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WILLIAM HEMINGE AND SHAKESPEARE

No one, so far as I can discover, has suspected that William Heminge's tragedy, *The Fatal Contract*, 1637, is in a large measure a plagiarism from the works of Shakespeare. Yet, in the whole scope of the Tudor-Stuart drama, perhaps, there is no such striking case of indebtedness to the great master, for language, imagery, ideas, and even in part for characters and plot.

This indebtedness, I think, may be directly traced to Heminge's closet study of Shakespeare's collected works as issued in the First Folio.¹ The influence of the Folio upon contemporary dramatists must have been far greater than is now commonly realized. Although the extent of this influence has not been made the subject of a special investigation, in the case of some authors it has been specifically noted. For example, Professor Neilson, writing in *The Cambridge History of English Literature* (VI, 212), observes: "The works of the master . . . could now be brooded over and assimilated in the study"; and he discovers in the plays of Ford and Shirley evidence of such a closet study. Exactly this seems to have been the case with Heminge. He thoroughly saturated himself with the dramas of Shakespeare; and then, drawing wholly on his memory, adorned his own writing with innumerable quotations and reminiscences of the earlier playwright's work.

In recording these quotations and reminiscences, I have had to rely almost entirely on my own verbal memory of Shakespeare's plays. My friend Mr. John W. Hebel has called my attention to about a dozen passages that escaped me, and I feel sure that additional passages could readily be pointed out by anyone familiar with Shakespeare's work. I have, however, gathered enough to show how extensively Heminge borrowed from the great playwright.

I. *Hamlet*

Hamlet, I, ii, 198-203:

In the dead waste and middle of the night
. . . . A figure like your father,
Armed at points exactly, cap-a-pe,

¹ He draws upon plays that were first printed in that volume.

Appears before them . . . thrice he walk'd
By their oppress'd and fear-surprised eyes.

Fatal C., p. 29:¹

Thy brother's Ghost, young *Clowis* Ghost in armes
Has thrice appear'd to me this dismall night.

Hamlet, I, ii, 255:

My father's spirit in arms!

Fatal C., p. 30:

My brother's spirit in arms.

Hamlet, I, ii, 226:

Ham. Arm'd, say you?

Mar. }
Ber. } Arm'd, my lord.

Fatal C., p. 30:

Was it in Armour, said you?

Hamlet, I, i, 60-61:

Such was the very armour he had on
When he the ambitious Norway combated.

Fatal C., p. 30:

Yes in that Armor he was us'd to wear
When we have run at tilt.

Hamlet, I, i, 47:

Together with that fair and warlike form.

Fatal C., p. 28:

Appearing in his Brother's warlike form.

Hamlet, I, v, 40:

O my prophetic soul.

Fatal C., pp. 19, 48:

O my prophetique soul.
My prophetique soul.

Hamlet, I, ii, 125-26:

No jocund health that Denmark drinks to-day
But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell.

Fatal C., p. 5:

And the Canon speaks health.

Hamlet, I, iv, 7-13:

[*A flourish of trumpets and ordnance shot off within.*]

Hor. What does this mean, my lord?

Ham. The king doth wake to-night and takes his rouse,
Keeps wassail, and the swaggering up-spring reels;
And as he drains his draughts of Rhenish down,

¹ The arabic numerals after *Fatal C.* refer to the pages of the first edition, 1653.

The kettle-drum and trumpet thus bray out
The triumph of his pledge.

Hor. Is it a custom?

Ham. Ay, marry, is't.

Fatal C., p. 7:

Dum. Hark, the thunder of the world, how out of tune.
This peace corrupting all things makes them speak.
What means this most adulterate noise?

Lam. Why, are you ignorant?

This is a night of jubile, and the King
Solemnly feasts for his wars happie succeſſe.

Hamlet, I, iv, 38:

Look, my lord, it comes!

Fatal C., p. 29:

Oh see, it comes!

Hamlet, I, ii, 245:

I'll speak to it though Hell itself should gape.

Fatal C., p. 43:

What is it, Eunuch? . . . Though death stood gaping wide
to swallow me, I would not shrink nor fear.

Hamlet, I, i, 46:

What art thou that usurp'st this time of night?

Fatal C., p. 29:

What art thou that usurp'st this dead of night?

Hamlet, I, iv, 84-85:

Unhand me, gentlemen.

By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that lets me.

Fatal C., p. 23:

Unhand me, *Charles*, and render me my self,
Lest I forget myself on thee.

Hamlet, I, v, 86:

Leave her to heaven.

Fatal C., p. 66:

let her sin

Be punish'd from above, i'l wait heavens leisure.

Hamlet, II, ii, 627-32; III, ii, 87:

The spirit that I have seen

May be the devil . . .

Abuses me to damn me.

It is a damned ghost that we have seen.

Fatal C., p. 30:

This is a damned spirit I have seen
And comes to work my ruine.

Hamlet, II, ii, 576-80:

Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from her working all his visage wann'd,
Tears in his eyes, etc.

Fatal C., p. 27:

As a good Actor in a play would do,
Whose fancy works (as if he waking dreamt)
Too strongly on the Object that it copes with,
Shaping realities from mockeries;
And so the Queen did weep.

Hamlet, II, ii, 617:

About, my brain!

Fatal C., p. 32:

About, my brain!

Hamlet, III, ii, 297:

I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pound.

Fatal C., p. 49:

I'll take thy word, *Eunuch*, for the Kingdom's wealth.

[Spoken by the King immediately after having received proof of the Eunuch's statement of the Queen's falseness.]

Hamlet, III, ii, 286-91:

Ham. Would not this, sir, and a forest of feathers—if
the rest of my fortunes turn Turk with me—with
two Provincial roses on my razed shoes, get me a
fellowship in a cry of players, sir?

Hor. Half a share.

Ham. A whole one, I.

Fatal C., p. 27:

Land. Most true, you wept.

Queen. As a good actor in a play would do,
Whose fancy works (as if he waking dreamt)
Too strongly on the Object that it copes with.
. . . . By this good night

I think I could become the Stage as well

As any she that sells her breath in publique.

[In each case, the passages quoted were spoken in the exhilaration following the success of prearranged acting.]

Hamlet, III, iii, 73-95:

With Hamlet's avowed desire to kill his uncle in his sins "that his soul may be as dam'd and black As hell whereto it goes," compare the following:

Fatal C., p. 41:

If (in her proud desire) I do prevent
Her lust this second time, before the third
She may repent and save her loathed soul,
Which my revenge would damn.

Hamlet, III, iv, 118:

And with the incorporal air do hold discourse?

Fatal C., p. 28:

Qu. O do not look on me, be gone, be gone.

Clot. Whom d'ee hold discourse with, with the air?

[In both cases the question is addressed to a person who was "holding discourse" with a ghost.]

Hamlet, III, iv, 139-41:

Ecstasy!

My pulse, as yours, doth temperately keep time
And makes as healthful music.

Fatal C., p. 37:

I am no spirit; tast my active pulse,
And you shall find it makes such harmony
As youth and health enjoy.

Hamlet, V, i, 99-101:

Did these bones cost no more the breeding, but to play at
loggats with 'em?

Fatal C., p. 31:

King, thou hadst better far have strook thy Father,
Dig'd up his bones and plaid at logats with them.

Hamlet, V, ii, 317:

Why, as a woodcock to mine own springe, Osric.

Fatal C., p. 55:

Behold, my Lord, the Woodcock's in the Gin,
Here lies the great *Landrey*.

Hamlet, V, ii, 326:

Laertes [to Hamlet, whom he has poisoned]. In thee there
is not half an hour of life.

Fatal C., p. 60:

Eunuch [to the Queen and Landrey, whom he has poisoned].
There's not an hour's life between ye both.

Just as Hamlet, on the point of death, requested Horatio to report his "cause aright" lest he leave "a wounded name" behind, so Clothair, dying at the end of the play, makes a somewhat similar request, of his two friends, Brissac and Dumain, "lest you inforce

posterity to blast My name and Memory with endless curses." The whole concluding scene is reminiscent of *Hamlet*.

Hamlet, I, ii, 12:

With mirth in funeral and dirge in marriage.

Fatal C., p. 36:

Your dirges into sprightly wedding airs.

Hamlet, IV, vii, 86:

He grew unto his seat,
And to such wondrous doing brought his horse,
As had he been incorp's'd and demi-natur'd
With the brave beast.

Fatal C., p. 65:

So Centaur-like he's anckor'd to his seat,
As he had twin'd with the proud steed he rides on;
He grows unto his saddle, all one piece.

Hamlet, III, iii, 411-12:

let not ever
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom.

Fatal C., p. 55:

What *French* Neronian spirit have we here?

Hamlet, I, ii, 129-30:

O that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew.

Fatal C., p. 48:

And the discreet composure of the world
Melt and dissolve to nothing.

Hamlet, I, ii, 149:

Like Niobe, all tears.

Fatal C., p. 27:

Did not I seem a *Niobe* in passion
A deluge of salt tears?

[Spoken by the Queen, after a false display of love for her sons.]

Hamlet, I, v, 29-30:

As swift as meditation, or the thoughts of love.

Fatal C., p. 24:

As swift as thought.

Hamlet, III, ii, 408-10:

now could I drink hot blood,
And do such bitter business as the day
Would quake to look on.

Fatal C., p. 48:

create
A spirit of horror in me, apt me to look
Upon such deeds nature would tremble at.

Hamlet, IV, v, 123:

There's such divinity doth hedge a king.

Fatal C., p. 25:

as thy king,
Divinity doth prop him.

Two young lords of France, Lamot and Dumain, are represented (p. 9) as having been absent as students at Wittenberg when, before the opening of the play, the Queen's brother was murdered.

Some of the indebtedness of the plot to *Hamlet* may be gathered from the passages that have been quoted. I may indicate briefly some further indebtedness.

Aphelia, as the name indicates, was suggested by Ophelia. She has a father, Brissac, who, like Polonius, is an "old man" and the king's counselor:

You'r weary of my counsell, and my place
May better be supplied by greener heads.

And in his youth, like Polonius, he had "suffered much extremity for love." Aphelia has also one brother, Charles, who seeks to preserve his sister's honor, and later to avenge her; to this extent he resembles Laertes. Aphelia is beloved by the Prince. At first old Brissac takes this to be a dishonorable love; when, however, he discovers that the Prince is genuinely in love, he behaves very much as did Polonius. He regrets that Aphelia is not at home when the Prince calls (p. 20):

This puling baggage
May lose herself for ever, and her fortunes,
For this hour's absence.

Aphelia's kinship to Ophelia is further indicated by various details. For instance, when the Eunuch places Aphelia to wait for the Prince, he says (pp. 20-21):

I will go call him, please you rest yourself:
Here lies a book will bear you company.

And the stage direction is: "Aphelia reads in the book." The king enters from behind, sees her reading, and comments on her beauty.

In some respects, however, Aphelia resembles Desdemona. The general indebtedness of the plot to *Othello* may be inferred from the quotations that follow.

II. *Othello*

Othello, III, iii, 165:

O beware, my lord, of jealousy.

Fatal C., p. 39:

beware of jealousie;

I would not have you nourish jealous thoughts.

Othello, I, iii, 293-94; III, iii, 206:

Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see:

She has deceived her father, and may thee.

She did deceive her father, marrying thee.

Fatal C., p. 39:

Though she has broke her faith to me, to you

Against her reputation shee'l be true.

[These words were spoken by the villain with the same purpose that inspired

Iago: "I have incenst the king with yellowness, With doubtful
phrases on Aphelia's fame"—p. 42.]

Othello, III, iii, 330-31:

Not poppy, nor mandragora,

Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world.

Fatal C., p. 19:

The drowsie Poppie, cold Mandragora,

Or all the sleepe sirrops of the world.

Othello, III, iii, 431:

I'll tear her all to pieces.

Fatal C., p. 43:

I'll tear him all to pieces, then.

Othello, III, iii, 341:

I found not Cassio's kisses on her lips.

Fatal C., p. 44:

Kiss me, sweet. [*Kisses her.*]

There's no deceit lies here.

[Moreover the king, though rendered jealous by the villain, is confounded, like *Othello*, at the sight of his wife—pp. 43-44.]

Othello, V, ii, 64-65:

And makest me call what I intend to do

A murder, which I thought a sacrifice.

Fatal C., p. 67:

It is not murder, tender-hearted fool,

Which thou commits, rather a sacrifice.

Othello, V, ii, 124:

Commend me to my kind lord.

Fatal C., p. 62:

Commend me to my Lord.

[Spoken by Aphelia when dragged in to a cruel death, prepared for her by her husband.]

Othello, V, ii, 291-94:

Lod. O thou, Othello, that wert once so good . . .
What shall be said to thee.

Oth. Why, any thing:
An honourable murderer, if you will.

Fatal C., p. 72:

Call me an honourable murtherer.

Othello, V, i, 12-14:

Now, whether he kill Cassio,
Or Cassio him, or each do kill the other,
Every way makes my gain.

Fatal C., p. 20:

Clovis inrag'd perhaps will kill the king
Or by the king will perish; if both fall,
Or either, both waies make for me.

Othello, III, iii, 355-56:

And, O you mortal engines, whose rude throats
The immortal Jove's dread clamours counterfeit.

Fatal C., p. 7:

Hark, the thunder of the world.

Othello, I, i, 91:

Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you.

Fatal C., p. 11:

They had the Devil [i.e., Moor] to their Grand-father.

Othello, II, iii, 160:

Who's that that rings the bell? [*A bell rings.*]

Fatal C., p. 24:

Ring out the larum Bell. [*Rings the bell.*]

[Shouted by the villain, when Clovis and Clothair fall to fighting.]

III. *Miscellaneous Plays*¹

Romeo and Juliet, II, ii, 119:

Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be
Ere one can say "It lightens."

¹ I omit a number of passages in which the verbal similarity is not striking. I feel sure, however, that these omitted passages were inspired by Shakespeare.

Fatal C., p. 31:

like lightning
Flash and away, dead e'er we say it is.

Romeo and Juliet, I, i, 117-18:

He swung about his head, and cut the winds,
Who, nothing hurt withal, hiss'd him in scorn.

Fatal C., p. 64:

I'll force a gentler nature in the steele
Which as it dies, should hiss it self to scorn.

King Lear, III, iv, 21-22:

O, that way madness lies, let me shun that;
No more of that.

Fatal C., p. 63:

No more of that, it tends to madness.

King Lear, III, iv, 30-36:

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides
. . . . O, I have ta'en
Too little care of this!

Fatal C., p. 59:

Poor unfed sides that passe along the street,
I now am sensible of what ye want.

King Lear, III, iv, 140:

The prince of darkness is a gentleman.

Fatal C., p. 54:

The Prince of darknesse is a Gentleman.

Richard III, I, ii, 1:

Set down, set down your honourable load.

Fatal C., p. 35:

Set down, set down your honourable load.

Richard III, I, ii, 12-13:

Lo, in these windows [i.e., wounds] that let forth thy life,
I pour the helpless balm of my poor eyes.

Fatal C., p. 35:

Let me bedew thy Herse [=corpse] with pious tears,
Balm to wounds.

Richard III, IV, iv, 231:

Till that my nails were anchored in thine eyes.

Fatal C., p. 11:

Within the cloathed circle of mine eyes,
Anchor thy fingers; alas, thy nails are par'd.

Richard II, II, iii, 85-87:

Boling. My gracious uncle—

York. Tut, tut!

Grace me no grace, nor uncle me no uncle.

Fatal C., p. 18:

Cha. My noble Father—

O. Bris. Tut, tut, tut! Noble me [no] nobles, nor Father
me

No Fathers.

Richard II, III, ii, 155-57:

Let us sit upon the ground,
And tell sad stories of the death of kings:
How some have been depos'd; some slain in war.

Fatal C., p. 71:

Yet we may sit
And gaze upon each other, tell sad tales of ruin'd Princes.

Richard II, V, i, 74-75:

Let me unkiss the oath 'twixt thee and me;
And yet not so, for with a kiss 'twas made.

Fatal C., p. 39:

A long farewell to love, thus do I break
Your broken pledge of faith; and with this kiss,
The last that ever *Clovis* must print here,
Unkiss the kiss that seal'd it on thy lips.

Richard II, V, ii, 7-9:

Mounted upon a hot and fiery steed,
Which his aspiring rider seem'd to know.

Fatal C., p. 65:

A bounding Courser, who is therefore proud
To be so back'd, as knowing whom he bears.

Coriolanus, IV, v, 240:

Peace is . . . a getter of more bastard children than war
is a destroyer of men.

Fatal C., p. 6:

This bastard getting peace.

Coriolanus, I, ix, 42-43:

When drums and trumpets shall
I' the field prove flatterers.

Fatal C., p. 8:

The Drums and Trumpets are turn'd flatterers.

As You Like It, III, iv, 16-17:

He hath bought a pair of cast lips of Diana.

Fatal C., p. 12:

sure thou hast bought
A paire of cast lips of the chast Diana's.

Julius Caesar, II, i, 166:

Let us be sacrificers, not butchers.

Fatal C., p. 25:

Let thy [hand]¹ sacrifice not butcher him.

Heming's other extant play, *The Jewes Tragedy*, of an earlier date, is also indebted to Shakespeare, although to a much less extent. *The Shakespeare Allusion Book* (which fails to mention *The Fatal Contract*) prints two scenes from *The Jewes Tragedy*, one a faint echo of Hamlet's soliloquy "To be, or not to be," the other an imitation of the watch in *Much Ado*. It fails to observe that the clownish soldier, Peter, imitates Falstaff in a soliloquy on the battlefield (p. 51):

Call ye this Honour? a pox of honor.

Nor does it observe that throughout the text there are frequent echoes of Shakespearian passages.²

This extensive plagiarism (if the word be not too harsh) we may readily pardon when we consider the intimate relations that existed between Shakespeare and the Heminge family.

The long friendship between William's father, John Heminge, and Shakespeare is one of the pleasant chapters in the all too slender biography of the great dramatist. For a period of nearly twenty years these two men were closely associated in the same theatrical organization, and acted on the same stage; and Heminge, beyond a doubt, assumed a conspicuous rôle in virtually all of Shakespeare's plays.³ Moreover, just as Shakespeare was prominent in the troupe for touching up and writing plays, Heminge was prominent in managing its pecuniary affairs.⁴ It was natural, therefore, for these two men, in their common interests, in their rehearsals and performances, and in their travels about the country, to develop for each

¹ The word "hand" is inserted in the third edition printed in 1687 with the title *The Eunuch*. This edition was printed from a different original manuscript. I am indebted to Mr. John W. Hebel for this note.

² Since this article was written, *The Jewes Tragedy* has been reprinted by Mr. Heinrich A. Cohn in Bang's *Materialien zur Kunde des älteren Englischen Dramas*.

³ Malone says that in a certain tract (the name of which, unfortunately, he has failed to preserve) Heminge is stated to have been the original performer of Falstaff.

⁴ He was commonly named first in documents of the day, as in the following: "To John Hemynges and the rest of his companie."

other a warm friendship. Evidence of this is not lacking. We find Shakespeare in his will leaving to Heminge the sum of 26s. 8d., with which to buy a memorial ring;¹ and some years later we find Heminge, with the assistance of Shakespeare's other actor-friend, Condell (but Heminge seems to have been the leader), collecting and publishing the dead poet's work, "without ambition either of selfe-profit, or fame: onely to keepe the memory of so worthy a Friend & Fellow alive, as was our Shakespeare." Ben Jonson, in his *Timber*, said of Shakespeare: "I loved the man and do honor his memory, on this side idolatry as much as any." The final clause, "as much as any," is significant, for it implies the existence of some who loved Shakespeare over well. May we not suspect that Heminge was among those whom Jonson had in mind?

Heminge at his death in 1630 left one surviving son, William (the author of our plays), as the sole executor of his will and inheritor of his shares in the Globe and the Blackfriars playhouses. Yet William was not, it would seem, an actor; and shortly after his father's death he sold his shares in the playhouses to the actor John Shanks. In a lawsuit which resulted from this sale, the specific statement is made regarding the younger Heminge that "he never had anything to do with the said stage."² We know that he had been well educated, first at Westminster School, and later at Christ Church, Oxford, where he received his Master's degree in 1628. The two actors³ who published *The Fatal Contract* in 1653 say in their preface: "This *Poem* was composed by a worthy Gentleman at hours of his recess from happier employments." It seems obvious from this that Heminge was not a common actor; but what his "happier employments" were we cannot now determine. We know only that he took enough "hours of recess" to compose several plays. One, *The Coursing of a Hare, or the Mad Cap* (licensed for the Fortune Playhouse, March, 1632-33), was destroyed by Warburton's cook. But two others, *The Fatal Contract* and *The Jewes Tragedy*, were printed

¹ Perhaps it is significant that Heminge is named first: "To my fellowes John Hemynge, Richard Burbage, and Henry Cundell, xxvj.^s viii.^d a peece to buy them ringes."

² Halliwell-Phillipps, *Outlines*, ed. 1885, p. 276.

³ A[ndrew] P[ennycuicke] and A[ntony] T[urner]. For the identification of these persons I am indebted to Mr. John W. Hebel, who is preparing to publish this play shortly.

shortly after his death; and these remain as the sole literary monuments of the Heminge family. It should be observed, however, that the editors of *The Fatal Contract* say further of the author: "At his death he left greater Monuments of his worth and abilitie." What works are here referred to we do not know; apparently they have not come down to posterity.

When Shakespeare died, William Heminge was a lad of fourteen. Doubtless he had spent much of his time about the playhouse, and perhaps he had occasionally assisted in the presentation of a play. It is likely, therefore, that he came to know his father's friend personally; and it is even possible that he formed a boyish attachment for the "gentle" playwright. If this be so, we may readily believe that his later intensive study of Shakespeare's work was in some measure inspired by a personal liking.

Is it too rash to inquire why in 1602 the actor, John Heminge, should christen one of his sons with the name "William"? We might suspect that Heminge intended this as a compliment to his "Friend & Fellow," who was now at the summit of his fame. If so, we might further suspect that at the christening, Shakespeare played the genial rôle of godfather. If he had been chosen as godfather for one of Ben Jonson's sons, why not also for one of Heminge's? That he performed this rôle with good-nature, we may infer from a small item in his will: "To my god son, William Walker, xx.^s in gold." William Heminge's devoted study of Shakespeare's plays in later years may lend some plausibility to this supposition.

Whether these surmises be true or not, the friendship of the Heminge family, father and son, to the "gentle Shakespeare" cannot be well doubted. And the history of that friendship as revealed in this paper furnishes pleasant thought for those "sweet silent" sessions in which we attempt to "summon up" the shadowy London life of the great poet.

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